



Ad-supported Comic Strips Coming To Cell Phones

By Laurie Sullivan
[TechWeb.com](#)

Thu May 4, 1:35 PM ET

A California startup plans to launch a free daily comic strip service delivered to mobile phones supported by advertising revenue, a co-founder told TechWeb Thursday.

SmashPhone will soon roll out *Girls & Sports* and *The Meaning of Lila*, with help from Creators Syndicate, a provider of comic strips to newspapers. A new comic strip called *Mostly Heads* will debut, too. The free service will run on an advertising model, where the ads appear before the comic strip.

The Meaning of Lila was created and written by John Forgetta, editorial director at American Greetings. *Girls & Sports* was created by Justin Borus and Andrew Feinstein, a former Warner Bros. animator. *Mostly Heads* is a new comic strip created by Darren Jones, a former E! Entertainment Network producer, and SmashPhone co-founder.

SmashPhone will charge advertisers 5 cents per frame, said co-founder Robin Rowe. "We're aiming for the top 100 companies to advertise," he said. "The usual ones like General Motors and Procter & Gamble."

Co-founders Rowe and Jones, both with ties to the entertainment and the open source communities, built the application to run on Java-compatible phone that have Internet access through a standard cellular carrier data plan.

Sun Microsystems' Java 2 Mobile Edition (J2ME) is the most commonly supported application platform, with more than 785 million installed handsets supporting Java-based games, according to research firm iSuppli Corp.

SmashPhone is compatible with most mobile phones that have color screens and most U.S. carriers, including Cingular, Sprint, and T-Mobile. Service isn't available through Verizon because the carrier relies on an incompatible technology called BREW, Rowe said.

Several ways gets users can connect with the service. Enter in the URL on the mobile phone, or fill out a form on a computer at [www.SmashPhone.com](#) to have a text message sent to the phone.

When the text message arrives on the phone, the user clicks on the URL or selects "Go To" from the phone's menu, then follows the prompts to install the SmashPhone player in the phone's Games folder. Once the SmashPhone player opens in the phone's Games menu, the player will stream the current day's comic strips.

The SmashPhone player, less than 20kb, uses Java and a lossless image compression standard called PNG to display beautiful comics. Many of the player's features run in code on the SmashPhone server, rather than the application on the phone.

The SmashPhone player software, though free today to encourage adoption, will eventually cost \$5. Rowe said the company has yet to sign on advertisers, "but there have been lots of interested companies." SmashPhone is a business unit of Movie Editor, a general partnership in California.